

# PROSPECT,

OR

*View of the Moral World,*

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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VOL. I.

SATURDAY, May 5th, 1804.

No. 22.

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*Comments upon the sacred writings of the Jews and  
Christians : Genesis, from chapter 37th.  
to the end of the Book.*

THE thirty-eighth chapter contains nothing but a long story about the prostituted Tamar, and her connection, with her father-in-law, together with some other indelicate remarks relative to the business of parturition; whoever will take the trouble to read the chapter, will find out what sort of holy writ it is. Almost all the remaining part of the book of Genesis, is taken up with a minute account concerning Joseph's being sold into Egypt.—The interview which he afterwards had with his brethren and his father—the wonderful dreams of Pharaoh, with their interpretation—the famine which is said to have succeeded—the speculations of Joseph, &c. &c. It is matter of extreme regret that internal evidence or that which flows from the very nature of a thing, does not make a deeper and more powerful impression upon the human mind; dreams, incoherent stories, and extravagancies, of every kind, are listened to with a zeal and avidity; destructive of all clear correct operations of intellect, and subversive of the just foundation of moral certainty. Historic details even when wild and extravagant, have something in them enchanting; men unaccustomed to Philosophic reflection are easily induced to yield a ready attention as marvellous and wonderful accounts. And in proportion to the times and places, when and where such things are said to have happened, are removed at a distance, they seem to assume a sacredness of character, and are covered all over with the incontrovertible glory of antiquity. Such is the fact in regard to this story of Joseph; it is a compound of the marvellous, the simple, the sympathetic and the deceptive. It has

been read in the christian world with universal applause; but it has never been analysed, or its true character exposed to human contemplation. Joseph it seems, who was an excellent Dreamer, and a still more excellent Interpreter of them, had offended his brethren, for which they conspired against his life, but afterward recinded their bloody resolution, and sold him to a travelling company of Ismealites, who again disposed of him for a servant in the land of Egypt. This Jewish slave, merely by the conjuring art of interpreting dreams, raised himself to a state of affluence, power and splendor under Pharaoh, then king of that country. The lascivious desires and intriguing conduct of Potipher's wife, had prepared for the hitherto ill-fated Joseph, scenes of fresh difficulty: his non-compliance with her amorous solicitations, had created in her bosom the rancorous sentiment of revenge. Joseph was thrown into Prison, from which however, his dream interpreting skill, procured an extrication. From this moment he became the rallying point of credulous fools, and the magicians of the country, were shorn in a great measure of their magical glories. Dreaming seems to have been the custom of those days, and the interpretation of dreams, a matter of vast importance. Pharaoh, like other foolish dreamers, wished that an explanation might be given to his dreams; Joseph was called upon for this purpose, and the royal dream was stated in this manner. And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed; and behold, he stood by the river. And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favored kine, and fat fleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, out of the river, ill favored and lean fleshed; and stood by the other kine, upon the brink of the river. And the ill favored, and the lean fleshed kine did eat up the seven well favored and fat fleshed kine; so Pharaoh awoke. (Genesis, chapter 41, verse 1st, &c.) This is one dream, and after this he took a nap and dreamed again in a similar manner, concerning seven full ears of Corn, &c. These dreams were interpreted by Joseph, to mean seven years of plenty, and seven years of famine. According to this explanation and as the story goes, Joseph set about the business of monopolising the produce of the country, and of preparing a scene of speculation and of despotic influence: which terminated in extorting from the Egyptians all their money, all their cattle, and then followed the loss of their personal liberty. All this may be said was wise and benevolent in Joseph; because without this arrangement the people must all have perished. If however, he was inspired by his



God with a foreknowledge of this wonderful long famine, would it not have been more honorable to him and the Deity whom he adored to have abstained from cruelty and extortion? but this Jewish God, had ways of working peculiar to himself, the propriety and justice of which, reason will never be able to discover; but faith can swallow down every thing, and some people imagine that the more absurd the thing believed is, the more merit there is in believing. Both the manner and the matter of this strange story of Joseph, stamp the whole business with fiction or with falshood. How can the dreams of an Egyptian monarch even if interpreted by a Jewish slave, be considered as divine revelation? dreams are but an imperfect operation of the mind, wild, disordered, and full of absurdity; yet they are made means of communication between heaven and earth, and one half of the revelations of the world rest upon this baseless and miserable foundation. If God intended to reveal himself at all to man, he would employ some better method than that of a half sleeping and half waking imagination. As to the business of interpreting dreams, it is a mere conjuring trade; nothing but the most stupid credulity could inspire any confidence in the interpreter's skill. The book of Genesis, is a compound of fiction, fraud, murder, lies, theft, prostitution, and filthy stories; we look back upon it with disgust and detestation, and wonder at the religious prejudice and superstition that can receive such incoherent stuff as the word of God. We close our Comments upon this book with a remark upon what is called a famous prophecy concerning Christ. The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: (Genesis, chapter 49, v. 10.) Christian expositors have applied this prophecy to the coming of Jesus Christ; but how can they with any propriety do this? Christ is not mentioned, and if Shiloh means Christ, it would have been better to have said so at once, and saved all further disputes upon the subject. No body knows who Shiloh is, and the word is as much like Bonaparte as it is like Jesus, and would apply as well to the one as to the other. Such vague prophecies should never be cited in proof of the divine origin of any system whatever.

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**T**HE Editor of the Propect, calls the attention of his readers to a celebrated work written by Rousseau; entitled a profession of faith of a Savoyard Curate. This work has had very little

circulation in this country, and from the known reputation of Rousseau, as a writer as well as the internal excellence of the work itself, it is presumed it will be favorably received by all our subscribers. The first part of the inquiry is more metaphysical, and perhaps to some readers less interesting than it will be found after we have advanced farther. There is however in this small work, such profound reflection and such sentiments of virtue as justly entitle it to a high share of estimation in the minds of virtuous and Philosophic men. If the discussions concerning matter and spirit should appear to some readers not altogether correct, it will nevertheless be satisfactory to display the operations of different minds upon such subtle and Philosophic subjects;—leaving the reader however in full possession of his inherent right to judge for himself, when he has weighed well the different arguments that are herein presented to his understanding.

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*Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Curate, from Rousseau.*

I was in that state of doubt and uncertainty, in which Descartes requires the mind to be involved in order to enable it to investigate truth. This disposition of mind, however, is too disquieting to last long; its duration being owing only to vice or indolence. My heart was not so corrupt as to seek such indulgence; and nothing preserves so well the habit of reflection, as to be more content with ourselves than with our fortune.

I reflected, therefore, on the unhappy lot of mortals, always floating on the ocean of human opinions, without compass or rudder; left to the mercy of their tempestuous passions, with no other guide than an unexperienced pilot, ignorant of his course, as well as whence he came and whither he is going. I said often to myself; I love the truth; I seek, yet cannot find it; let any one shew it me and I will readily embrace it; Why doth it hide its charms from an heart formed to adore them?

I have frequently experienced at times much greater evils; and yet no part of my life was ever so constantly disagreeable to me as that interval of scruples and anxiety. Running perpetually from one doubt and uncertainty to another, all that I could deduce from any long and painful meditation was incertitude, obscurity and contradiction; as well with regard to my existence as my duty.



I cannot comprehend how any man can be sincerely a sceptic, on principle. Such philosophers either do not exist, or they are certainly the most miserable of men. To be in doubt about things which it is important for us to know, is a situation too perplexing for the human mind; it cannot long support such incertitude; but will, in spite of itself, determine one way or other, rather deceiving itself than content to believe nothing of the matter.

What added further to my perplexity was, that, being educated in a church whose authority being universally defective, admits not of the least doubt; in rejecting one point, I rejected in a manner all the rest; and the impossibility of admitting so many absurd decisions, set me against those which were not so. In being told I must believe all, I was prevented from believing any thing, and I knew not where to stop.

We have no standard with which to measure this immense machine; we cannot calculate its various relations; we neither know the first cause nor the final effects; we are ignorant even of ourselves; we neither know our own nature nor principle of action; nay, we hardly know whether man be a simple or compound being; impenetrable mysteries surround us on every side; they extend beyond the region of sense: we imagine ourselves possessed of understanding to penetrate them, and we have only imagination. Every one strikes out a way of his own across this imaginary world: but no one knows whether it will lead him to the point he aims at. We are yet desirous to penetrate, to know, every thing. The only thing we know not, is to remain ignorant of what it is impossible for us to know. We had much rather determine at random, and believe the thing which is not, than confess that none of us is capable of seeing the thing that is. Being ourselves but a small part of that great whole, whose limits surpass our most extensive views, and concerning which its Creator leaves us to make our idle conjectures, we are vain enough to decide what is that Whole in itself, and what we are in relation to it.

Taking a retrospect, then, of the several opinions, which had successively prevailed with me, from my infancy, I found that, although none of them were so evident as to produce immediate conviction, they had nevertheless different degrees of probability, and that my innate sense of truth and falsehood leaned more or less to each. On this first observation, proceeding to compare, impartially and without prejudice, these

different opinions with each other, I found that the first and most common, was also the most simple and most rational; and that it wanted nothing more, to secure universal suffrage, than the circumstance of having been last proposed.

The love of truth, therefore, being all my philosophy, and my method of philosophising the simple and easy rule of common sense, which dispensed with the vain subtilty of argumentation, I re-examined, by this rule, all the interesting knowledge I was possessed of; resolved to admit, as evident, every thing to which I could not, in the sincerity of my heart, refuse my assent; to admit also, as true, all that appeared to have a necessary connection with the former, and to leave every thing else as uncertain, without rejecting or admitting it; determined not to trouble myself about clearing up any point which did not tend to utility in practice.

But, after all, who am I? What right have I to judge of these things? And what is it that determines my conclusions? If, subject to the impressions I receive, these are formed in direct consequence of those impressions, I trouble myself to no purpose in these investigations. It is necessary therefore to examine myself, to know what instruments are made use of in such researches, and how far I may confide in their use.

In the first place, I know that I exist, and have senses whereby I am affected. This is a truth so striking that I am compelled to acquiesce in it. But have I properly a distinct sense of my existence, or do I only know it from my various sensations? This is my first doubt; which, at present, it is impossible for me to resolve: for, being continually affected by sensations, either directly from the objects of them, or from the memory, how can I tell whether my self-consciousness be, or be not, something foreign to those sensations and independent of them?

My sensations are all internal, as they make me sensible of my own existence; but the cause of them is external and independent, as they affect me without my consent, and do not depend on my will, for their production or annihilation. I conceive very clearly, therefore, that the sensation which is internal, and its cause or object which is external, are not one and the same thing.

Thus I know that I not only exist, but that other Beings exist as well as myself; to wit, the objects of my sensations; and



though these objects should be nothing but ideas, it is very certain that these ideas are no part of myself.

Now every thing that I perceive out of myself, and which acts on my senses, I call matter ; and all those portions of matter which I conceive united in individual beings, I call bodies. Thus all the disputes between the Idealists and Materialists signify nothing to me : their distinctions between the appearance and reality of bodies being chimerical.

Hence I have already acquired as certain knowledge of the existence of the universe as of my own. I next reflect on the objects of my sensations ; and, finding in myself the faculty of comparing them with each other, I perceive myself endowed with an active power with which I was before unacquainted.

To perceive is only to feel or be sensible of things ; to compare them is to judge of their existence : to judge of things, and to be sensible of them, are very different. Things present themselves to our sensations as single, and detached from each other, such as they barely exist in nature : but in our intellectual comparison of them they are removed, transported as it were, from place to place, disposed on and beside each other, to enable us to pronounce concerning their difference and similitude. The characteristic faculty of an intelligent, active being, is, in my opinion, that of giving a sense to the word *exist*. In beings merely sensitive, I have searched in vain to discover the like force of intellect : nor can I conceive it to be in their nature. Such passive beings perceive every object single or by itself ; or if two objects present themselves, they are perceived as united in one. Such Beings having no power to place one in competition with, beside or upon the other, they cannot compare them, or judge of their separate existence.

To see two objects at once, is not to see their relations to each other, nor to judge of their difference ; as to see many objects, though distinct from one another, is not to reckon their number. I may possibly have in my mind the ideas of a great stick and a little one, without comparing those ideas together, or judging that one is less than the other : as I may look at my hand without counting my fingers. The comparative ideas of *greater* and *less*, as well as numerical ideas of *one*, *two*, &c. are certainly no sensations, although the understanding produces them only from our sensations.

It has been pretended that sensitive Beings distinguish sen-

sations one from the other, by the actual difference, there is between those sensations : This however demands an explanation. When such sensations are different, a sensitive Being is supposed to distinguish them by their difference ; but when they are alike, they can then only distinguish them because they perceive one without the other ; for otherwise, how can two objects, exactly alike, be distinguished in a simultaneous sensation ? Such objects must necessarily be blended together, and taken for one and the same : particularly according to that system of philosophy, in which it is pretended that the sensations representative of extension are not extended.

When two comparative sensations are perceived, they make both a joint and separate impression ; but their relation to each other is not necessarily perceived in consequence of either. If the judgment we form of this relation were indeed a mere sensation, excited by the objects, we should never be deceived in it ; for it can never be denied that I truly perceive what I feel.

( *To be continued.* )

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*Elihu Palmer.*

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PUBLIC DISCOURSES concerning the principles and character of Christian superstition, will be delivered by the Editor every Sunday evening at seven o'clock, at Shepherd's Long-Room, No. 11, George-street.

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#### NEW-YORK:

PRINTED and published by the Editor, No. 26, Chatham-street, at 2 dollars per annum, one half paid in advance, every six months.